

# THE DEAF AMERICAN



**ALABAMA GOVERNOR SIGNS PROCLAMATION**—On September 29, 1988, Guy Hunt, Governor of Alabama, signed a Deaf Awareness Week proclamation. At the ceremony in Montgomery were, first row (left to right): Floyd Little, Geraldine Little, Belinda Brewer, Earl Lindsey, Marilyn Adams, Maggie P. Walker and Tammy Adams. Ms. Brewer is an interpreter with the Janice Capilouto Center for the Deaf; Mr. Lindsey is head of the Division of Rehabilitation and Crippled Children Services, Alabama Department of Education; Ms. Adams, who is deaf, works in the State Capitol; Ms. Walker is president of the Montgomery Chapter, Alabama Association of the Deaf, and a member of the Advisory Committee of the DRCCS; Ms. Adams is director of the Capilouto Center.



STATE OF ALABAMA

# PROCLAMATION

BY THE GOVERNOR

WHEREAS, the World Federation of the Deaf is an international organization composed of seventy national associations of the deaf which, in collaboration with the United Nations (UNESCO, World Health Organization and International Labor Office), serves all countries in the enhancement of the social, economic and cultural lives of hearing-impaired people; and

WHEREAS, the World Federation of the Deaf has in the past thirty-five years provided leadership at the International level to medicine and audiology, psychology of deafness, educational development and innovation, vocational rehabilitation, communications methodology, personal and social welfare, art and culture, parent education, and religious activities; and

WHEREAS, the National Association of the Deaf will participate as an integral part of the Deaf World Week celebration of the World Federation of the Deaf; and

WHEREAS, representatives from a wide area of leadership in the United States of America serving hearing-impaired populations throughout the world will be observing this significant event in recognition of the contributions geared to the needs of hearing-impaired people throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alabama offers its wholehearted welcome and best wishes to all participants for a renewed spirit of togetherness tempered by intensified commitment to quality life for the entire hearing-impaired population of the nation:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Guy Hunt, Governor of the State of Alabama, do hereby proclaim September 25 through October 1, 1988 as

## NATIONAL DEAF AWARENESS WEEK

in the State of Alabama, and invite all of our citizens to join me in the observance of this week-long occasion.



GIVEN UNDER MY HAND, and the Great Seal of the Governor's Office at the State Capitol in the City of Montgomery on this the 29th day of September, 1988.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Guy Hunt".

GUY HUNT

**The National Association of the Deaf**

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## THE DEAF AMERICAN

*The Deaf American* is a quarterly publication aimed at the professional community, as well as at the layman who want indepth stories and articles about topics of interest in the deaf community. Libraries, schools, community centers and other information dissemination sources find *The Deaf American* a convenient source of information for patrons and students.

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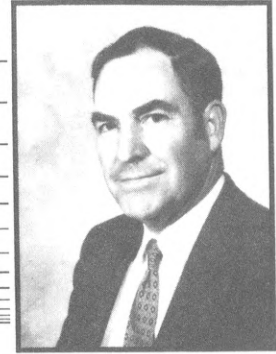
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Editor Jess Smith



### **Gallaudet and Clerc University?**

A proposal has been made to rename Gallaudet University—a change to Gallaudet and Clerc University. The rationale is obvious—Laurent Clerc deserves equal recognition with Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet in pioneering education of the deaf in the United States. The timing is also appropriate—the movement last winter which led to the naming of the first *deaf* president of Gallaudet University.

Only a couple years or so has elapsed since Gallaudet was elevated from college to university status. The technical change in name should not pose a problem.

Harlan Lane, among others but mainly so, has revived long overdue recognition of Laurent Clerc in his semifictional book, *When the Mind Hears*. His in-depth professional research has bolstered the recognition of Clerc as a co-worker with Gallaudet in the founding of the American School for the Deaf—and more so, Clerc's professional and personal attributes as a pioneer deaf educator of the deaf.

Also noteworthy is the number of deaf educators, including founders of schools for the deaf, who followed in Clerc's footsteps. While sign language and the prestige of deaf teachers of the deaf later declined to a low state, the credibility and persistence of deaf professionals remained noteworthy. Often unheralded, they were the backbone of many residential schools for the deaf staffs.

We may sound biased, but who dares question Clerc's contributions? What is the problem in a name change? Washington University became Washington and Lee in Virginia. We have Washington and Jefferson and Franklin and Marshall in Pennsylvania. The list is extensive. (We could even cite the College of William and Mary as an example of dual names.)

### **Statewide Telephone Relay Systems**

In our most recent issue, we erred in the count of existing statewide telephone relay systems. Instead of five, eleven systems are in operation. Another state, New York, is scheduled to inaugurate its system on January 1, 1989.

We know of several states and/or telephone systems, which publish TDD listings but hesitate to guess at the number. For example, South Central Bell has an Alabama directory, prefaced by invaluable information regarding placing of calls, charges and the like. Organizations of and for the deaf also have their own TDD listings on a local—or even statewide—basis.

### **Funding of Research and Projects**

In the 1960's, we witnessed an outpouring of federal funds for research and projects having to do with deafness and the deaf. The next decade witnessed a tapering off. In the 1980's, funding has been sharply reduced at the federal level. This reduction has not been offset at the state or local level despite the trend towards such discretionary funding.

State associations of the deaf, as well as other organizations, have become increasingly aware of opportunities to apply for whatever funds might be available to support services for the deaf, either in cooperation with other agencies or in free-standing ventures. Each state has its own unique opportunities—and problems.

A few state associations have been able to obtain funding for state offices/services for the deaf. Some have been able to start up through specific bills or "line items." Others have found it necessary to latch onto existing agencies.

Ascertaining what needs to be done and the chances for success is quite a task. Authorization for projects does not necessarily mean funding. One established, offices/services must face up to ongoing justification for survival.

Services for the deaf must also compete with those for other groups of handicapped, each of which strives to maintain its own entity as serving a specific group. Probably the worst thing that can happen is for different groups to be lumped under one service agency. (We, however, see no argument against including the deaf-blind with the deaf for most purposes.)

Key to success invariably is "playing the political game." The deaf must analyze the political structure in a given state or locality and act accordingly. In an election year, this means contacting candidates. Then it calls for ongoing and persistent efforts. Appreciation for assistance must be shown, too.

### **American Sign Language for Credit**

Several states have accepted American Sign Language for high school credit courses, on the same footing as "foreign" languages. Resistance is apparent in some states, however. Teachers of other foreign languages do not want additional offerings lest they face further declines in their own courses. This is because foreign languages are not required in most state secondary schools as was the case in years past. Also, stepped-up requirements in the basics—English, mathematics and science—have resulted in fewer class slots for electives.

# Presentation By Ms. Flora Garrett To The Alabama Disabled Persons Protection Commission

Hearing Held October 25, 1988, at Montgomery, Alabama

Recently, Deaf Awareness Week was celebrated nationwide for the period of September 24 through October 1, 1988, and Alabama's own governor, Honorable Guy Hunt, signed the proclamation designating that week for observance in Alabama. Maggie P. Walker, president, Montgomery Chapter of the Alabama Association for the Deaf (AAD); Mrs. Tammy Adams, Director, JCCD; Earl Lindsey, Supervisor of Deaf Services for the State Vocational Rehabilitation Department; Marilyn Neal, who works in Governor Hunt's office; and Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Little, members of the First Baptist Church of Montgomery were all on hand to witness the signing. We are proud of Governor Hunt for his keen interest and love for the handicapped citizens of Alabama and for making this opportunity available to us to come before his commission to be "heard." Our hats off to Governor Hunt!

We thank Attorney General Don Siegelman for setting up regional hearings all over Alabama, giving us all a chance to speak out about what has probably never come to one's attention before. This is the purpose of the Alabama Disabled Persons Protection Commission.

We, of the deaf community, are very fortunate that we don't face as many barriers in our day-to-day activities and work. However, there is room for improvement and I would like to take this opportunity to tell about just a few of the things that would improve the quality of life for the deaf:

## TDD Telephones for the Handicapped

TDD telephones need to be placed in every hospital, fire station and at all police stations. Staff members of these facilities should be trained to use and respond to incoming calls from the deaf. My telephone book lists a Montgomery TDD number at the police station. I've tried calling this number off and on for the past three years with no response. Their TDD's are in a corner collecting dust. Like their daily drills, staff in these life-protecting agencies should be taught to use the TDDs, and to call all the deaf in their towns once in awhile. My grocer demands my telephone number, more than my proper current address. Yes, my check could bounce just as easily as a "normal" person's could—but when my grocer calls me up, he gets only a rude, cruel knocking sound made when I hit my "GA" key. "Ga! GA! GA!" I plead. "Who's calling? Lordy, Lordy me!" I get no answer for he has hung up. All because my grocer does not understand that he can't call me, even though I have a telephone number, unless he, himself, has a TDD. I hope and pray that our Attorney General has one in his office and that he has insisted that his staff become familiar with how the Deaf talk. The Deaf do not have jet speed—we are slow typers, thus our prohibitive telephone bills. Sooner or later, hopefully, South Central Bell and AT&T will come up with a fairer method of charging us—for what we say, not the amount of time we spend saying just one word—"H E L L O!"

## Television Decoders

Our television stations tell us that it would entail great, costly changes which they can't afford to provide more and better captioned programs. Some movies, even though captioned, cannot be read because of misspelling. Sometimes the print goes too fast for us to read. The voice, the tune part, is perfect, the picture is perfect, but for the deaf, misspelling, or no captions at all, prohibit our understanding of what we see. In many cases, where programs are captioned, television stations take the option of not showing them because of the expense. Deaf viewers pay the same monthly bills. Why are we short-changed?

## Accommodations for the Deaf Made in Building Codes

As you are probably aware, lots of retirement homes—I mean apartments—have been built with HUD funds which require that all be treated equally. Ramps are built for wheelchairs, doors are widened to accommodate them. Barriers are removed for the blind. Water fountains are lowered for small people, etc. There are absolutely no provisions made for the Deaf. Just simple wiring for our doorbells and additional outlets for television and telephones are costly to the Deaf. Builders don't have to do it for us, but are required to put in ramps, etc., for others. Incorporate the needs for the Deaf in the building codes and then ENFORCE THEM!

There are many other areas where the Deaf could be helped. There are no provisions made for recreation and enjoyment for the Deaf. There is a need for retirement homes *solely* for the deaf. Alabama needs more interpreters to assist the Deaf in their dealings with the "hearing" business world. Businesses should be encouraged, even mandated, to have TDD's in their places of work. Public agencies most certainly should have them to deal with deaf inquiries and assistance. EVERY FIRE DEPARTMENT, POLICE DEPARTMENT AND HOSPITAL should have a TDD and trained staff to use/respond to them.

The Deaf pay tax monies that are used by appropriate committees in both the House and Senate. Where is our share? Why are we not included for a portion of the United Appeal? We have never asked our governor, city councilman, county commission to dig in their emergency funds for a handout. Mainly because most of us are hard-working citizens and because we have pride in our independence. We don't want to beg for our part—we DESERVE equal treatment!

There are many ways in which the deaf could be assisted if the State of Alabama chose to make this a concern. A check could be made to see how many elderly citizens participate at the food stamp centers. It could be feasible to furnish assistance to the Deaf through the state legal department giving the Deaf protection in court. Financial assistance could be given the elderly who only qualify for Social Security, but because they have worked hard and own their homes or life insurance, are not eligible for the additional SSI benefits.

# *New Zealand Sign Language Resurrected*

For nearly a century, deaf residents of New Zealand were forbidden to use sign language because educators believed speechreading was the only sound way to teach them. Despite the ban, an "underground" system of signing developed but the Educational Department chose a foreign sign system called "Australasian" when it finally decided to broaden its approach in 1982.

With the recognition of signing as a teaching tool, the New Zealand Association for the Deaf turned to the National Center on Deafness, California State University, Northridge (CSUN), for help. Dan Levitt, then senior interpreter at the Center and currently director of the Self Actualization Institute for the Deaf in Hollywood, was contracted in 1986 to train signing interpreters who might, in turn, train others.

Basing at Auckland Teachers' College, Levitt discovered that the underground system, now called New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), was universal among the deaf over 18 and that Australasian textbooks were of no use. His problem was that NZSL had never been documented so Levitt recruited eight students and enlisted the help of 40 informants who were fluent in NZSL to work on a dictionary.

"Ours was the first effort of this kind," he recounts. "For many of our tutors—some of them about 70 years old—it was an act of courage. Earlier they would have been ashamed to admit they knew it. They'd never had anyone recognize NZSL for what it is; a true language with its own grammar and vocabulary."

As a result of their work, "Introduction to New Zealand Sign Language" was published in 1987 with good reviews, but Levitt is quick to admit it is not a definitive work.

"We didn't use the word 'dictionary' because it sounds so complete and even with all the research and work we did, we've probably only documented about 20 percent of the language," he says.

Completion of the task fell to the eight interpreters Levitt trained, and Rachel Locker, foremost among them, enrolled at CSUN for a summer to study teaching techniques and broaden her knowledge of American signing.

"I came on my own, backed by a grant from the McKenzie Foundation," she said. "It's fascinating to see the differences in our two countries. Deaf people at home are much more invisible than they are here."

Another, major difference is that CSUN has about 80 interpreters serving 200 deaf students while Locker and the seven students Levitt trained with her are the only accredited NZSL interpreters in New Zealand.

Locker's duties as a government interpreter have included everything from translation of Mass during a visit of the Pope to facilitating job interviews and interpreting for the court.

New Zealand's fledgling program appears to be proving its worth, she reports, and Locker hopes one day soon its scope will be broadened so that it matches services provided American Deaf.



NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE—Demonstrating New Zealand signs at California State University, Northridge, are, left to right: Rachel Locker, Lisa Bednar, Caroline Preston and Dan Levitt. Levitt wrote the first dictionary of New Zealand sign language while on leave of absence.

# Making The Museum Environment Work For The Hearing Impaired

By ANN WHITE MARTIN, President  
The National Learning Center, Washington, D.C.

How can there be noise in the world of someone who is hearing impaired? A world which to a hearing person would seem to be, above all else, silent? Yet, there is noise as I was surprised to learn.

The National Learning Center is currently running a project which we simply call "Hasbro" because it is funded by the Hasbro Children's Foundation. The purpose of the project is to develop as many ways as possible in which children's and other hands-on museums can better serve people who are hearing impaired. An advisory committee, with many hearing impaired members, looks over our shoulders to make sure our ideas are sound.

*"... staff . . . carry picture scripts in their apron pockets . . ."*

The project is developing well. Our staff of 56 exhibit interpreters is learning sign language. They carry picture scripts in their apron pockets which remind them how to make signs for important words and concepts. Most staff can sign at least 20 words, including answers to the most frequently asked questions: Where is the bathroom? Where is the water fountain? We have also given the staff slates so they can write messages to hearing impaired visitors.

A vital part of the project has been overcoming the fears of staff who have never been around the hearing impaired. As one staff member said, "I get scared when I think about talking to

people who *can* hear, I don't know *what* to do with people who *can't*." The hearing impaired staff have different problems. They can lipread and thus know if the hearing staff make unkind remarks about them. When worn continuously, their hearing aids hurt, and they resent the hearing staff members' asking them to wear the aids all the time. These unsympathetic attitudes of both groups typify any we/they relationship. These attitudes are not surprising.

What *is* surprising is the reaction of the hearing impaired to the Museum environment. They find it full of "noise," as the word is used in Shannon's theory of communication. In this theory, "noise in the system" refers to anything that interferes with the transfer of information from sender to receiver. For a hearing impaired person, there is interference in the Museum environment which interrupts the flow of information.

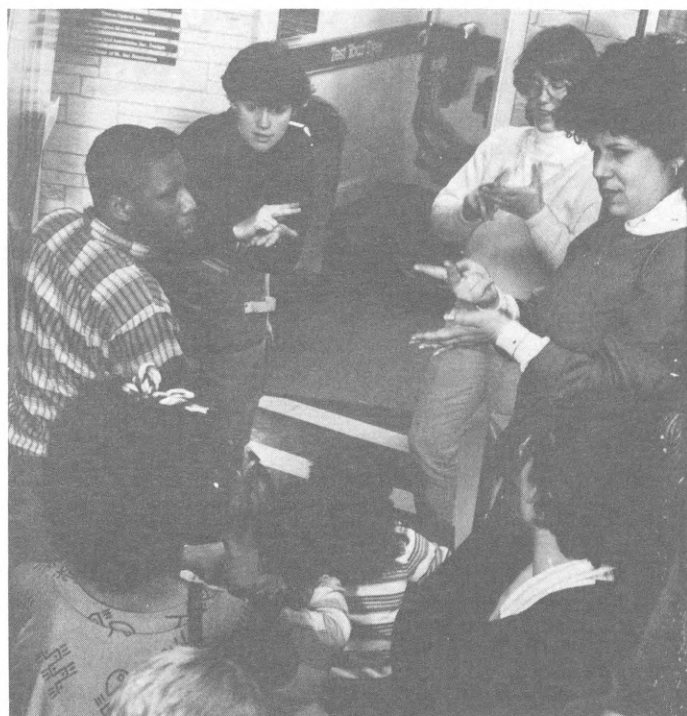
Consider: The hearing impaired receive *most* of their information visually. They cannot "overhear" anything; they cannot casually read a newspaper and simultaneously take in information through their ears. Hearing persons can recall information from a peripheral conversation on which they are not even focusing. The hearing impaired person has no such peripheral luxury; he *must be looking at something* to "hear" it. We can hear danger; the hearing impaired person cannot.

Many hearing impaired people say that their eyes become



METRIC EXHIBIT—A staff member at Capital Children's Museum explains an exhibit of metric applications to a young hearing impaired visitor.

CITY ROOM—Members of the Capital Children's Museum sign to young visitors in the City Room Exhibit.



tired. This may be due to the fact that they must concentrate harder, must pay closer attention because they can take in information *only* through their eyes. They must monitor the environment with their eyes at the same time they are using their eyes to focus on relevant information. This creates tension between the need to get the information which you must have for the task at hand and the simultaneous need to get information about what is happening in the environment: "Is Fifth Street to the right or left?" the hearing impaired person asks a passerby, and at the same time that he watches for the answer, he must pay attention with no auditory clues to the street light, the traffic flow, the crowd of jostling teenagers coming from behind.

*"If you are hearing impaired, first you attend, then you look."*

Humans gather information multi-modally—through the eyes *and* ears. Hearing impaired persons are forced to gather information linearly: if you are listening to a museum guide, you cannot *also* be looking at the painting the guide points to. If you are hearing impaired, *first* you attend, *then* you look. If you steal a glance, you risk missing a critical piece of information. Then, when you return your gaze to the lips or hands of the guide, you have to "find your place." If you did in fact miss a critical moment, you might never catch up with the sense of the presentation. All your clues are visual—looking, speech reading and reading body language.

When I was in fifth grade, I had whooping cough. I missed five months of school, the five months when the class learned to figure percent. My arithmetic figuring is fast and accurate. I find my way around the number system rapidly, combining tens, recombining units and making full use of number facts which are so familiar—they require no active thought processing. But, while I have learned how to figure percent on a calculator. I have no intuitive feeling for the way it functions; I never caught up with the five months I missed. Percent is my black

hole. I do not even have enough of a frame of reference to ask questions about how percent functions.

It must be the same for hearing impaired people who miss a critical piece of information. They must have many black holes as a result of many times when, in an innate human response, they try simultaneous processing with a sensory dysfunction that demands linear processing. Imagine not being able to overhear; imagine having to pay attention visually at all times. How stressful. It is no wonder that the hearing impaired say, "My eyes are tired."

*"... great care must be taken not to overload a person visually."*

When our Advisors returned from a tour of the Museum, they made these comments: The Museum is so crowded. My eyes got tired. The excited responses of the hearing kids drown out the hearing impaired kids' responses. What our Advisors are telling us is that there is too much for the hearing impaired person to process visually. While one might think that, deprived of your hearing, you would want *more* visual information, in fact the opposite is true. With the visual sense as the main operative, great care must be taken not to overload a person visually.

Several things are particularly hard on a hearing impaired person's eyes:

**Pattern.** If you are watching an interpreter sign, patterns that are boisterous compete for your attention with the interpreter's hand and lip movements. So do strong plaids and stripes. They are distracting. I imagine that this is much like those illusions in which sometimes you see one thing, sometimes another: now a vase, now a face. If you see this illusion for the first time and see only one of the figures, the image is not confusing. But, once the second image penetrates your consciousness, it is hard to block it out. These illusions then seem to flip, virtually of their own accord, from one to the other, vase, face, vase, face, back and forth. It could be the same for the hearing impaired.

A bold plaid and the movement of an interpreter's hands could set up competing visual patterns so that your eyes are drawn, inadvertently, from one to the other.

*"... a hearing impaired person's eye is drawn to the high contrast 'edge' when a person stands against a white background."*

**Color.** Bright colors also compete for attention. Different colored backgrounds have different effects on a person standing in front of them. If an interpreter is standing against a bright white background, it is hard for a hearing impaired person to read his hands and lips. A colored background is better. The eye is inadvertently drawn to the place where contrast is sharpest. Psychologists who are studying infant intelligence recommend putting large geometric shapes in the environment. They advise us to use black or bright red shapes on a white background. The reason is to draw the infant's eye to the edge of figure, and the high contrast and sharp contour of a geometric figure will do this. Likewise, a hearing impaired person's eye is drawn to the high contrast "edge" when a person stands against a white background. This edge, like the bold pattern, competes for the hearing impaired person's visual attention. In the area of infant intelligence, the goal is to stimulate an infant's heightened visual processing; for the hearing impaired person, such stimulation is dysfunctional.

**Light.** Lighting level has long been known to affect us, and persons who engineer the work place for maximum efficiency take great care with the lighting. Lights which are too bright, too dim or too glaring put extra stress on a hearing impaired person's visual system as do competitive patterns and colors.

**Spatial Organization.** Where an interpreter stands, where the hearing impaired person sits makes a vital difference in what the person "hears." If your line of sight is blocked, if you have

to crane or strain to keep the interpreter's hands and lips in sight, if you cannot see the full face of the interpreter, you may miss the meaning. So, how the furniture is arranged and where people are placed is especially important in any situation where a hearing impaired person must gather information. When a hearing impaired person structures these settings, he intuitively takes these factors into account. He knows that a round table offers the best visibility, that position and information are inextricably linked.

*"... our hearing impaired visitors say the environment is noisy."*

What messages do these observations convey for setting up museum environments? I thought our Museum was visually quiet. We have been careful to use soft grays on the walls and carpets, to use color only when it means something, and not to "decorate" the walls unless the words and images convey essential information. We have put no gratuitous visual elements in the environment. Still, our hearing impaired visitors say the environment is noisy.

What we realize is that hearing impairment enhances visual distractors, and therefore, in structuring an environment for the hearing impaired, it requires vigilance to be visually efficient. You must police the environment to remove harsh white walls, to provide restful and adequate light levels. You must purge clutter.

These requirements might set up a conflict, because by optimizing conditions for the hearing impaired, you might undo an environment that is effective and stimulating for a normal person. Your judgment, informed by the sensitive advice of someone who is intimately familiar with the deaf culture, will help you find the right balance.



PATTERNS AND SHAPES—A Capital Children's Museum's Pattern and Shape Exhibit, with focus on the nose, is explained in sign language. The Museum is part of the National Learning Center in Washington, D.C.

*"Ask a hearing impaired person to take you into his world for a few hours."*

While you are searching for the right balance between the hearing person's need for multi-modal stimuli and the hearing impaired person's need for visual calm, try this: Ask a hearing impaired person to take you into his world for a few hours. Spend some time on the other side where gestures, not sounds, are the primary vehicle for transferring information. It will be strange, it will be frightening. But, you will use your eyes in a new way in an environment dominated by sign language. Sign language has evolved in the deaf community as form of communication which raises gestural and facial expression to new heights. You will observe unparalleled refinement of hand and facial gesture.

If you are involved in the management of a museum, tell your staff that the most important thing they can do for hearing impaired visitors is to encourage them to interrupt presentations, to tell you that they did not get something, to ask you to repeat, to turn around, to move into more light or less light, to

take off your plaid vest. And, make certain that your staff conveys this message to the person who is hearing impaired: "It is not your fault if you missed it, and I'll be delighted to try to get the noise out of the environment."

*"We are taking a strong advocacy position in support of museum and other public experiences that better serve the hearing impaired."*

At The National Learning Center, we are becoming sensitized to how the Museum can better serve those who are hearing impaired. As the Hasbro project progresses, we shall be publishing information on all aspects of our findings—ways to modify the museum environment, how to make hearing staff more sensitive and how to enrich the experience for the hearing impaired person. We are developing products in 3-D, print and video. We are also taking a strong advocacy position in support of museum and other public experiences that better serve the hearing impaired. All the results of our work will be made available to as large an audience as possible. If this report of our work peaks your interest, please give us your comments and suggestions.

## How To Communicate

By Christine Wixtrom

### 1. ESTABLISH POSITIVE COMMUNICATION GOALS:

- I want to "hear" and "see" you—to UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU SAY.
- I want to SHARE MYSELF—my ideas and feelings—WITH YOU.
- I want to GIVE AND RECEIVE CLEAR MESSAGES.
- I want to ENJOY TALKING WITH YOU AS A UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL.

### 2. RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO USE YOUR STYLE OF "COMMUNICATION" AS A SHIELD, A SWORD OR A BANNER:

- Don't talk without taking time to listen.
- Don't use "communication" to dominate and manipulate others, forcing them to use the method of communication, language, grammar or vocabulary choices that you prefer.
- Don't try to promote your preferred method of communication as the One True Way. (Instead, **do** demonstrate flexibility and tolerance by allowing each person to express and receive communication as he or she prefers.)

### 3. SHOW CREATIVITY:

- If your first attempt to communicate fails, try another way!

### Materials Required for Successful Sign Language Communication

#### 1. WILLING HANDS

You can do it! The main requirement is willingness, not manual dexterity, perfect hands or talent.

People who face all kinds of barriers have learned to sign, including those with arthritis, cerebral palsy, missing fingers, big or small hands. Just remember that it may take some time for you to learn to feel comfortable using hands, face and body to talk.

#### 2. AN EYE FOR UNDERSTANDING

If you demonstrate a positive attitude, you will have success. An attitude of respectful interest is far more important than fluency.

Most of us are not used to depending on our eyes to capture fleeting information. But "reading" sign language is a skill, like any other, that can be practiced and learned. Rather than striving to see every sign, relax and just try to get a general idea of what is being said. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification.

#### 3. AN OPEN MIND

Most importantly, keep an open mind about communication strategies. There are many ways to communicate. It doesn't much matter **how** communication happens. Do whatever you can to help "make it happen"!

# Growing With Life's Challenges: Deafness

By SOLANGE SEVIGNY-SKYER

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the term *challenge* is defined as: the quality of requiring full use of one's abilities. With that definition in mind, growing up deaf can be defined as a challenging experience—an experience which necessitates continuous growth, change and constant coping throughout life. Deafness is an experience which mandates the disabled individual to use his full abilities: his mind, his beliefs and his convictions in order to overcome its limitations. It mandates this individual to grow and learn from each hurdle or frustration which confront him. Some individual may view deafness as an obstacle, a misfortune or as a condition to be resigned to. My preference is to look at it from the more optimistic view. The latter view may be easier said than practiced, but it is possible to have this conviction. I can say it, because I am living proof of having lived with and conquered deafness.

Much earlier in my life, the burden of deafness weighed heavily upon me. As I struggled with learning to develop language, to speak and to mingle with people outside of home I also had to learn to face ridicule and rejection. Born profoundly deaf—my deafness was not discovered until I was 18 months old. Being able to develop language and speech required my using a bulky hearing aid that would enable me to hear the most rudimentary sounds. Learning to watch lip movements on a mirror while trying to imitate sounds resembling speech became the first of many painstaking challenges, imitating each sound required many hours of practice and repetition. Learning to develop language to be able to communicate simple commands, thoughts and wants came next in the series of challenges. Associating sound combinations with the object it represents are easily mastered by those who hear normally, but becomes a challenging task for those who do not hear.

Being mainstreamed into elementary school at a young age occurred during a time when integration of hearing and deaf students was a new and untried concept. It was then I had to face a multitude of new experiences in addition to learning the basic academics. Learning to communicate and socialize with hearing classmates as well as learning to "speechread" teacher's silent moving lips characterized challenges during those years. Fortunately having the motivation to learn enabled me to persevere in spite of some of the setbacks. Upon entering my junior high and high school, the tables were turned. It was there the harsh reality of what discouragement, ridicule and rejection meant came to the fore. Trying to fit in with the "hearing crowd" in spite of being different was a challenging and sometimes formidable task. Tragically, I could not help but build a glass wall to protect myself from further pain of ridicule and rejection. Within that glass wall, I could see life's silent charade and not participate in high school's activities.

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That same glass wall didn't allow for much social growth—books became my faithful social companion and teacher. It was through books I could safely visualize and feel what life outside of that glass wall might be like. It was through books I could learn what I couldn't speechread from my teachers.

Entering a hearing college became even more strenuous. One can imagine how it might be to struggle to maintain satisfactory grades in classes without the support of an interpreter, notetaker or tutor. I had too much pride to ask for help. It was not uncommon to be in classes filled with hundreds of students, or to view a semester's course on a television monitor. The horror of trying to overcome such seemingly impossible and astounding feats spurred me to prove I could succeed. No one was going to tell me I couldn't make the grade. Being told I couldn't continue with my education major occurred during my junior year at college. This became the first of many battles I would fight and win. Much to the disternment of college administrators, proving myself capable enabled me to become the first deaf student teacher certified to work with hearing children. Graduating from college with outstanding scholastic grades and earning two permanent teaching certificates were the highlight of challenges won.

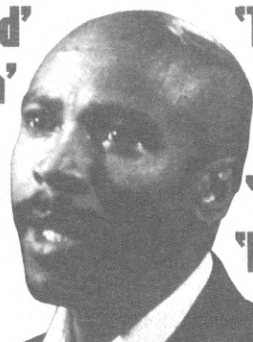
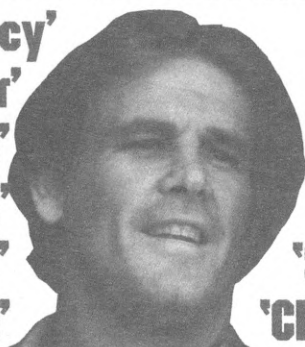
Upon graduating from college, encountering employment barriers and discrimination became a painful reality. Being armed with teaching credentials and having had two successful student teaching stints were not enough to break down those barriers. I vividly recall being bluntly told by a school superintendent during a job interview of his reluctance to hiring a deaf teacher for fear parents would raise a ruckus. After a year of continuous rejections and out of desperation, I met with the town mayor to beg his assistance. He forced my being hired into the public library under a Federal training program. Working in the library provided a much needed two-year hiatus which gave me time to reassess career options and generated the impetus to move on to bigger challenges and loftier dreams. Goals of servicing my own kind of people became the incentive to furthering my education. The fulfillment of that dream became reality upon entering the world's only liberal arts college for the deaf.

One would think because of my own deafness, entering a college for the deaf would be a godsend. Not so for me. Having been raised in a hearing culture and not being able to communicate in the language of the deaf were two strikes against beginning adjustment to a deaf environment. Only through tried and true perseverance and determination did I learn to tackle understanding deaf culture, understanding my true deaf identity and mastering the art of using hand and finger movements to symbolize verbal language. It was a long and difficult battle to be won, it was another challenge to be conquered. Many a tears were shed in learning to accept and be proud of what I was and what I had been through. I am grateful and humbled for having been through so much. I have mellowed. I am still learning. I am still coping, I am still being challenged. The true beauty is that I now perceive deafness as a positive challenge, not as the formidable obstacle I once perceived it to be.

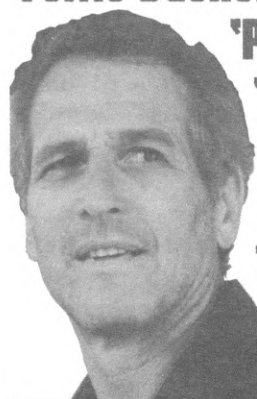


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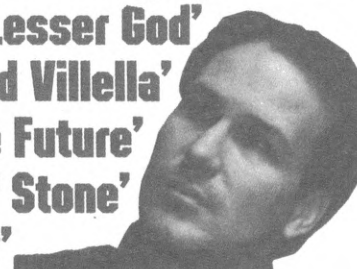
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DA/Fall 88

This interview with Leon and Hortense Auerbach is one of 160 conducted by EUGENE W. PETERSEN while he was in the Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet College, 1986-1987. During that time, he and his wife, Inez, traveled around the country to interview a total of 160 people to get a cross section of the contemporary deaf community in the United States. The interviews were unstructured and open-ended with questions kept at a minimum to encourage spontaneity.

A representative selection is now being edited for a book that will try to get to the real people behind the many demographic and statistical studies of this population.

## *The Good Old Days* Leon and Hortense Auerbach

"From buying one-fourth a loaf of bread at a time, we went to buying two eggs at a time."

*A favorite pastime of oldtimers is looking back. Leon and Horty Auerbach can look back with satisfaction.*

*Leon was lucky enough to be born in a deaf family and had a happy, normal childhood. Horty, as everyone calls her, had more problems growing up which may have contributed to her spunk as a young wife when times were hard.*

*The Auerbachs have grown old gracefully. Horty retains her wonderfully mobile face, which often says more than her hands. She has received many honors for her volunteer work. Leon is easy going and cheerful. He's content to let younger people mow the lawn and take care of heavy chores around their home in Hyattsville, Maryland, but, like Horty, he gives much time to volunteer work.*

*Their comfortable home is filled with books, pictures and mementos of their travels.*

**Leon:** It's strange. I was born deaf and my parents were both deaf but they weren't born deaf; they lost their hearing when they were little children. My sister is like them, she lost her hearing when she was four or five years old. I was the only one born deaf and none of my relatives was ever born deaf. The doctors can't figure it out. Perhaps it was coincidence, a one in a thousand chance.

I was born in Brooklyn, the home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. I know they have moved to Los Angeles but when I was growing up, their home was Brooklyn. My father worked in a clothing factory; my mother never worked, she always stayed home and took care of us children. There were actually five of us but two died. My father worked in a mill where they made shirts—Van Heusen or Arrow. I can't remember which.

I went to the New York School for the Deaf, which was called Fanwood. It was in New York City at that time but later moved to White Plains. It was near the Hudson River and I would often get up in the morning and watch the water flowing by. It was beautiful. At night you could see the boats with their many lights moving up the river. They looked so romantic. I dreamed that some day I would ride one of the boats to Albany, but I never did.

With deaf parents and a deaf sister, my world was a deaf world. I also had a hearing sister and brother. My brother was

a good signer and all of us depended on him to interpret or talk with outside people.

There were many activities sponsored by churches, clubs and the Frat (National Fraternal Society of the Deaf). The Frat always had an annual picnic and all five of us would go together. We'd bring our own food and enjoy the day with our deaf friends. And movies . . . oh, yes, we went to the old silent movies with titles. That was before "talkies" appeared in 1929. We used to love going to the movies and when I was a little boy, I'd often go alone. It only cost a nickel. Sometimes my parents would give me five cents for the movie and five cents for candy. I didn't like popcorn, I'd always buy candy. I'd go every Saturday and watch the serials. I've forgotten the names of the old actors but I remember the trains coming and then it would be continued next week and the next week. It didn't really make much sense; the serials didn't follow a sequence like they should. After the movie, they would always have cartoons. I



Leon Auerbach was born in Brooklyn and attended the New York School for the Deaf, White Plains, before enrolling at Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University).



Hortense (Henson) Auerbach was born in Missouri, attended the Arkansas School for the Deaf and was a member of the Gallaudet College Class of 1940.

remember one time I watched the movie and was sitting there anxiously waiting for the cartoons and there were no cartoons. They showed the newsreel and coming attractions, but no cartoons. Boy, did I get mad! I made a scene.

In the summer when it was warm, we would go to outdoor movies. We sat on benches and watched the movies under the stars. Of course, that was long before drive-ins were invented. When they started adding sound to the movies and discarded captions, I lost interest and spent more time reading or I'd find some deaf friends who lived not very far away and we'd talk.

We'd go to other picnics, we'd ride the boats, we'd go to the ball games and sit in the bleachers. It only cost 50 cents. There wasn't any shade or any overhead protection and the sun would bleach the seats. That's how they got the name "bleachers." Everyone would get tanned. Often they would hit a ball into the bleachers but I never caught one. I knew that if I could catch one of those balls, the players would autograph it for me, but I never did. A group of us boys would wait by the players' gate and I got to meet Babe Ruth. He was really wonderful. As far as I know, he never turned down a request of an autograph. He'd sign things left handed and he'd stand there with his cigar hanging out of his mouth. I have two or three of his autographs but I don't know where they are now.

Also, as a boy I loved to read. My home was near the public library and I remember taking my bike and leaving it outside the library while I checked out books and no one ever stole it. I don't think you could do that nowadays. I had a wire basket on my bike and I'd check out four or five books at a time. My favorite was Tom Swift. I think I read all the Tom Swift books. I remember reading about the poor boy selling papers and shining shoes and at the end he'd be rich. I always liked the kind with a happy ending. I hated stories with sad endings. I remember now, the success stories were in the Horatio Alger books. I read many books when I was a boy, but the stories didn't make a lasting impression even though they did much to help me develop vocabulary and language skills.

Growing up deaf in New York City was fun . . . at least in my family and neighborhood. I never saw or knew a family like that one depicted in the TV play, "Love Is Never Silent."

All the teachers at Fanwood could sign but that didn't matter. We all had to use oral communication so they tried signing and using speech at the same time. I remember my math teacher said that I talked very well. He said that he could understand me and it should make my parents proud. "Boy, your speech is very good and you have a good voice." So I would keep on trying to speak but when I went in a store and asked for something simple, like milk, they wouldn't understand me and looked at me as if to say, "What's wrong with your voice?" As I grew up, I found out my voice wasn't good at all; even if people understood me, they would ask if I was a foreigner or something. It was embarrassing. My children would say, "You know, you talk good." But they were used to my speech; when I was in a store, they didn't understand me. I gradually stopped speaking and depended more on pad and pencil.

**Horty:** I was born in Missouri. My father died in November, 1918, and I was born the following February. I had three brothers and no sister: I've always wanted a sister. To support her family, my mother went to work in a factory where they made overalls. She married again when I was two years old but continued to work. I could hear until I was nine years old when I lost all my hearing through spinal meningitis.

At that time, we lived in a small town called McGehee in Arkansas, with a population of about 3,000. There were no hospitals in that town so they decided that I would stay home and be quarantined. They had a big sign on the door of our house and people were not allowed to come in and visit us. My brothers and mother got their shots to keep them from getting sick. It was a long time before I finally got well and before that the neighbors told my mother that I wouldn't live. They thought for sure I was going to die. I would talk and talk about seeing my father who had died before I was born. I would describe what he looked like and how he kept saying "Come on." But I didn't die. That's an experience I'll never forget.

I had to learn to crawl all over again and then how to walk. The neighbor children would walk past our house and they would laugh at me because all I could do was sit there. I remember that very clearly. My parents didn't know what to do with me after I became deaf. They looked in the encyclopedia and found a picture of the two-handed manual alphabet and taught me how to use it. It was no problem for me to talk to them as I still had normal speech but I never could read lips, so they would write notes.

I told my mother, "You know why I became deaf? God is punishing me because a few years ago when I was on a train going to visit grandfather; I saw two deaf ladies and I made fun of the way they were signing. God is punishing me because I laughed at them." Of course, my mother said, "No, no, no. That's not the reason why you became deaf."

Then a preacher came along. He was a faith healer and he told my mother, who was a very religious person, that if she would bring me to the prayer service, they would open my ears. But my mother said, "No. I don't really have a deep enough faith to believe in that. I don't believe it would help Hortense."

We didn't know about the school for the deaf and the first year after I became deaf, the principal of the public school wanted me to come back to school—the same school and the same class and have me just sit there. I really felt left out. My friends got tired of writing to me so they just kinda left me alone. I read and read and read. I read all the Bobbsey Twins books, all the different children's books I could get my hand on.

My mother was always very protective of me because I was the only girl in the family. She wasn't so concerned about the boys. My stepfather had a violent temper, especially when he had been drinking. He never touched me, never; but I'll never forget how angry he got with my brother for climbing up the new church building. My stepfather whipped him and whipped him. It was horrible. But he did support me and my brothers, who were not his own children.

Finally, my parents heard about the Arkansas School for the Deaf in Little Rock. They got in touch with the people at the school and asked if they could accept me. So that fall, I believe it was in 1932, they made plans to send me to the School for the Deaf. It was the first time I was away from home. I was really heart-broken and my mother didn't want to send her only daughter away but she felt she had to. She couldn't bear to go to the school with me, so my father took me on the train.

When we arrived at the school and I saw all those kids moving their hands so rapidly, I was terrified. I remembered the two deaf ladies talking with their hands and how I had laughed at them. I thought now I'm going to be like them.

My stepfather felt really sorry for me and gave me some money but I didn't even look at it. We were really poor so I didn't expect much. But after he left, I looked at it and found I had a ten dollar bill. I felt rich beyond my wildest dreams. The most money I had ever had at one time was five or ten cents and here I had \$10! The other kids came around pointing to their eye to say they wanted to see it and I'd show it to them and the word spread that I was rich. A couple of hours passed by and my stepfather came back and asked, "Where is the money I gave you?" When he saw the \$10 he had given me, he took it back. He had meant to give me only \$1. So he took the \$10 and didn't give me anything and there I was with nothing to show the kids. I really felt strange.

The supervisors were hearing and I became one of their pets because I had good speech. They started teaching me sign language and the kids tried to pull me away from the supervisors who were teaching Signed English or Pidgin Signed English, (although we never thought of it that way back then) and teach me American Sign Language (ASL). In order to survive in the dormitory, where the kids signed so rapidly, I had to learn their system. Nobody seemed to notice it at that time but there were two different kinds of sign language in use at the school. The only distinction they would make was between oral communication and sign language.

By the end of the school year in May, I stood on the platform and gave a presentation in sign and speech. I was very proud of myself. It didn't hit me that they never mentioned I could hear up to age nine.

**Leon:** At my school, they had weekly chapel services. I didn't go home on weekends and so every Sunday morning they would have services and the teachers would come in and sign. I never

saw an interpreter. Their signs were really good and I enjoyed watching them. We also had monthly Literary Club meetings where we would sit and tell stories and recite poems; but it was mostly stories, sometimes more like pantomime, acting it out. Signing straight or "cold" wasn't very interesting, but using a lot of expression, a bit of hamming it up, made it very interesting for people to watch.

One of the classics that I remember was Reynard Fox, who lived up to his name. He was always very foxy. He was really an early con artist and he would tell stories in *The Raindrop*, a famous literary magazine for deaf children. I have an original copy somewhere. When I was a boy, I used to read every issue from end to end.

I took the Gallaudet College entrance exam and was accepted in the fall of 1935. I went on a bus because my dad couldn't afford the train. There were only about 50-55 students at that time. I roomed with a boy from New Jersey and we divided our room. Half would be New York, the other half would be New Jersey and the dividing line was the Hudson River. My roommate's name was John Blindt. We roomed together for three years. He's dead now.

I knew how to drive when I went to college and decided I wanted a car. John and I walked over to H Street, where there was a used car lot, and found a Model A for \$50. We split it \$25 apiece. At that time, students weren't allowed to drive on campus. You could drive, but it had to be off campus and we'd park on a nearby street. There was a good reason for this: If you could afford to buy a car, then you could afford to pay for your own tuition. At that time, all but one or two of the students got scholarships from Congress, like cadets at West Point.

I wrote to my Congressman's office and explained that my parents didn't have enough money to send me to college and he arranged a scholarship to Gallaudet. It paid for tuition, room and board; I had to pay for books, clothing and transportation. At that time, Fanwood had a special fund and they would give each graduating senior \$100 to help get started. I used the money for the bus fare, clothes, books and dues for various things.

**Horty:** I graduated from tenth grade (the Arkansas School's highest grade) when I was 16 and went on to Gallaudet that fall. At that time, they didn't have any special VR counselors for the deaf. They did have a VR office but money was scarce and all they could give me was train fare, which I didn't need as my stepfather worked for the railroad and got a pass for me.

The superintendent of the Arkansas School for the deaf was Mrs. Riggs. She begged clothes from different people so I would have enough for college. My parents were too poor to buy much in the way of clothing. I got money for tuition and room and board the same way as Leon.

There were three other students from the Arkansas School who went to Washington together so I didn't feel lonesome on the train. It took all one day, one night and half another day to get there. When I arrived in Washington, it was big and it was scary, but I had already adjusted to deafness so Gallaudet wasn't too bad.

The school year went by quickly. I wasn't too excited about going home for the summer because I was the only deaf person

in the family. My family did try to learn the two-handed alphabet and progressed to some signs and fingerspelling but there really wasn't much communication in the home. It was more interesting being with other deaf kids and people who could sign. But I went home and because we were so poor, we didn't have much to do. I found a real thick book—a history of World War I. It was the most boring book I ever read, but I read it from beginning to end because I had nothing else to do.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I hadn't become deaf. I might have stayed in that small town, married a hearing man and raised a whole string of kids without traveling all over the world like we have done or becoming involved in so many activities.

**Leon:** Sometimes I'd go downtown alone and buy things like clothing and candy or go to a movie. You could only take a girl out on a date on Sunday afternoon and you had to bring her back by five or six. The girls had to wear hose and gloves, they couldn't wear bobby socks. They looked so sophisticated in their best dresses. We'd walk to Union Station just for entertainment.

**Horty:** That's how I met Leon. The girls at Gallaudet today have their own cars and run around in jeans and shorts and stay out to all hours with their boyfriends but I really doubt if they have more fun. Since we were permitted so little contact with the boys, we enjoyed it all the more when we were together. We didn't have to be wild to have fun.

**Leon:** Our dining room was called the refectory. When I arrived at Gallaudet, the word was new to me. Refectory means an eating room, usually near a chapel or monastery or convent; the name has almost disappeared. The boys sat on one side and the

girls on the other side of the building in another room. Everything was separated. If you wanted to meet and talk with the girls, you had to meet them in the afternoon outside on the campus. You weren't allowed to talk to them in their rooms. There was no physical contact allowed; in other words, you couldn't hold hands. It just wasn't allowed. Of course, the students found ways to get around this rule, like walking back to the dormitories after chapel services. The older students had a little more freedom; they could have dates on Saturday and the upperclassmen could go out in the evenings. But for the first two years, the preps and freshmen had to stay in their room and do their homework every night from 7:00 to 10:00. A faculty member would come in and check on the students.

The boys would walk over to H Street, which is about five blocks from Gallaudet, and they could walk up and down the street even late at night. It was perfectly safe. You can't do that today.

There were always more hearing teachers than deaf teachers, but some of the students came from residential schools where there were no deaf teachers at all, so it was a new experience for them. Then, as now, some students came on campus who were hard of hearing, not deaf, and some had lost their hearing as youths or teens and had good speech but didn't know any sign language. Tom Dillon was in my class. When he arrived, he had absolutely no signs and we communicated back and forth by writing. He had attended public schools. They were highly selective about admissions at that time. Maybe 300 high school students would take the entrance exam and they'd accept only 40 or 50. Gallaudet had only 130-150 students while I was

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there. You knew everybody's name, where they came from and even their families. It was a very close knit student body.

Gallaudet has always advertised that it uses simultaneous communication in the classrooms—that is, the professors talk and sign at the same time. They now call it Total Communication. Actually, fluency in sign language varied among the hearing faculty. Take good old Dr. Doctor (Powrie V. Doctor). He has a deaf brother, his mother worked at the Kansas School for the Deaf and he grew up basically in the deaf world, yet he wasn't really good at reading sign language. If I signed without using my voice, he had a hard time understanding me. His own signs were clear, that wasn't the problem; he signed very well. But he had a hard time understanding the students who didn't have good speech and that's the truth. Then there was Dr. Charles Ely. He grew up in a school for the deaf, his father was superintendent of the Maryland School for the Deaf. Dr. Ely signed very well but when he fingerspelled a word, especially if it was a long word, if he saw we were following him, he would fingerspell just the first and last letters. It was a kind of blur in between and you were supposed to guess what was in between. I liked Dr. Ely. We became used to his fingerspelling. He taught chemistry.

I can't remember all the hearing professors but one stands out, Dr. Irving Fushfeld. His signs were so clear and he was also famous for his sarcasm.

I graduated in 1940. I was interested in science and talked to Dr. Percival Hall, the President of Gallaudet, and explained that I wanted to continue studying for a masters degree. Dr. Hall said, "Let's look around and see if maybe you can get into a college near a residential school for the deaf where you can work part time while studying for your degree." I got several offers. The Arizona School for the Deaf needed a teacher for printing. It was a part-time job teaching printing and part-time supervising and they paid me \$40 a month plus room and board at the school, which wasn't too bad in those days.

**Horty:** Leon and I got married a year after graduation from Gallaudet and I joined him in Arizona. We lived in the chauffeur's quarters, adjacent to the superintendent's garage. It was one room with a tiny shower and toilet but quite comfortable. To earn my "room and board," I worked in the dining room, took care of the superintendent's small son and served as a substitute teacher. (In those days, husband and wife couldn't both be employed by the state.) We lived in Arizona for only one year but have vivid recollections of picnics in the colorful mountains surrounding the school, the dust storms, the 100° plus temperatures in summer, the month-long Cowboy Days celebration in February. A beautiful state and an idyllic first year of marriage!

**Leon:** I taught school while I attended classes at the University of Arizona. It was only a couple of miles from the school to the university and I'd go back and forth in my car. Some of the science classes required labs and the labs were almost always in the afternoon when I had to teach printing at the school for the deaf, so I changed my major to math. I continued as dorm supervisor in the evenings. I kept up that routine until one Sunday in December the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I had never heard the name Pearl Harbor before; I didn't realize it was in Hawaii.

**Horty:** All my brothers went to war. The oldest and the one down from me met each other in England. I'm grateful that none of them got killed.

I remember very clearly that we couldn't afford to buy much food. We would buy only one-fourth of a loaf of bread at a time. They would sell food that way in those days. The spiders bothered me more than the food shortage. I met my first black widow spider while we were at the Arizona School for the Deaf, (shudders). It really scared me. I had had some experiences with tarantulas at the Arkansas School down in the basement of the dorm. I'm terrified of both; I just can't get over my fear.

**Leon:** While I was at the University of Arizona, one professor became a good friend. We would write back and forth to communicate. In April after Pearl Harbor, he asked me if I would be interested in research for the war effort. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was looking for young people interested in research. Yes, the MIT, the egghead school. Horty and I moved to Boston and stayed there until near the end of the war.

**Horty:** The Army needed him to help develop radar so we moved to Massachusetts. I had my first experience with a blizzard—and I mean a real blizzard—the first year we were there. I had had difficulty finding a job because people would ask me if I could read lips. Massachusetts was a very oral state and I kept answering no. I was really stuck. Out of frustration, I finally took a job in a factory. It had been converted from making some kind of pushbutton thing to making digital controls for the Air Force. They were very cautious because it was dangerous work, but they accepted me. On my first day there was a blizzard. At that time, I had no car and the factory was very far from where we lived. I walked through the blizzard, fighting it all the way, and arrived at work. There were just a very few people showing up for work that day but I was allowed to stay.

It was a horrible machine I had to work on. It punched out some type of metal parts and it was piece work. The more you did, the more you earned. I was the only deaf person there. They had a safety device that went around your wrist so that when the punch came down, your arms were pulled out of the way. One hearing girl wanted to make more money and the safety device slowed her down, so one day she decided not to use it and she got her hand caught in the machine. It destroyed her hand (shudders).

**Leon:** The war was winding down and Dr. Hall, who was still at Gallaudet, asked me if I would be interested in a teaching job. I had thought about doing that some day, so I talked to the supervisors at MIT and they said the war would soon be over and when it ended, they would have to cut back to normal staff. They said, "You had better go ahead and take the job." So we came back to Gallaudet in the fall of 1944 and stayed there until I retired last year after 40 years as a professor of mathematics.

The MIT had been paying me very good money and Gallaudet offered me \$1,800 a year. Dr. Hall said we could live on campus in the little house they now call the Gate House, on the corner of Sixth Street and Florida Avenue. They deducted the rent from my salary. It was about \$40 a month and they didn't charge us for the heat because it was connected to the central

heating system. We lived there during the last year of the war. **Horty:** It looked so small from the outside and was only a little bigger when you got inside. From having to buy one-fourth a loaf of bread at a time, we went to buying two eggs at a time. We lived in this tiny house with our two children. One was two and a half years old, the other 17 months. One day I was talking with a friend and a black lady came across the street and pointed to our children, who were sitting on the sidewalk throwing bottles in the middle of the traffic on Florida Avenue. We had to stop the traffic while we swept up everything.

**Leon:** We lived on campus during the last year of the war. We were there when they celebrated VE Day. It was really wild. That was the only time in my life that something like that happened.

I got to see the funeral of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. I was standing right near the casket while they were bringing it through town. I remember the hero's welcome for Eisenhower when he came back from Europe. People were crowded all along the streets yelling and screaming and throwing things. It wasn't like New York City's ticker tape but it had a flavor all its own. I saw all the presidents from Eisenhower, Truman, Kennedy to the last. I remember election night in 1948. We didn't have TV sets at that time so three of my friends went with me to the newspaper office where they had a big sign that gave election results. I had voted for Truman but I was afraid Dewey was going to win. I didn't like Dewey; he was a stuffed shirt. Truman would lead, then Dewey would get ahead. About 10 p.m., the paper said Dewey would win easily. The next day, I was surprised to hear Truman had won. Dewey had gone to bed thinking he had won. The next morning, Truman came to Washington on the train and I was downtown again when they drove Truman and his wife through town. They had a big sign on the *Washington Post* building that said, "We will eat crow." I'll never forget that.

I went back to school at Catholic University (C.U.) to complete work for my masters. I didn't have a car then so I would ride the streetcar. There were no interpreters. I would go up to the professor and tell him I was deaf and ask if he could recommend additional reading to help me keep up with the class. Once in a while, an instructor would loan me his notes but mostly I had to depend on the books. Sometimes I couldn't understand them and sometimes the assigned textbook was better.

There was a priest who sat next to me in one class. He was actually a brother, he didn't become a priest until later. I asked him if he would mind if I copied his notes and he was happy to let me do that. We became good friends. His name was Brother Bonaventura. He became interested in deaf people and joined the first sign class offered at C.U. It was taught by a woman named Slattery. I can't remember her first name, oh, yes, Gertrude. She married Earl Elkins and later they were divorced. One of their children, Earl Jr., is now an interpreter at Gallaudet. Gertrude was the first deaf teacher at C.U.

I graduated from C.U. with a masters and kept right on studying for my Ph.D. I went to see Dr. Leonard Elstad, who was president of Gallaudet at that time, and explained that I really needed an interpreter. He said he would see what he could do but nothing came of it. I took a couple of courses and paid for everything myself, but it was expensive.

I needed about 15 to 20 hours for my doctorate. I went to the



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University of Illinois and they had an interpreter there named Floyd McDowell. I got A's as long as I had an interpreter. I got some A's without an interpreter, but I also got some B's and C's. With an interpreter, I always got an A.

When I went to the University of Maryland, I had Lou Fant for an interpreter. It was a course really not for my doctorate but just something I wanted to take. I thought maybe I would add to it later. Many deaf people have gone through college and earned advanced degrees without interpreters but a good interpreter makes it easier and you learn more.

**Horty:** They were good years, if hard years. I got a lot of satisfaction helping Leon up the academic ladder and raising our kids. As the years passed, our financial situation improved and we were quite comfortable. We now have seven grandchildren. Three live in England and four live in this area so I get to play with them often. We've had a happy life and are enjoying retirement even though some bad things have happened, like two grandchildren having leukemia in the same family. It really puzzles the doctors. They have studied the whole family on both sides and have decided it must be the environment or the house where they lived but they're not really sure. Both children are now in remission and we are optimistic they will be cured.

We're both active volunteers. I help out at the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA), Gallaudet and our church. We don't attend the clubs much any more but we have a pot luck group that we've been with since 1952. We get together once a month and eat pot luck, watch films and watch each others' children grow up, get married and have grandchildren. I'm glad to say that many other people in the Washington area have imitated our pot luck group.

I have noticed there is a decline in club activity and church attendance but picnics and athletic events are well attended. It may be that younger deaf people aren't interested in getting involved and accepting responsibilities as in the past but I think there will always be a deaf community because of our common communication. We're so much more comfortable with each other. No matter how much we love our hearing friends, when there is a crowd of people, half deaf and half hearing or 75/25, the deaf people always tend to get together. They'll talk with the hearing people for a while then they get tired of that. It's almost never comfortable.

**Leon:** I help out at the NAD Credit Union and at the Gallaudet National Information Center on Deafness. They have asked me to sub teach or act as a fill-in while they recruited a full-time teacher but I tell them "No way." They're having a hard time finding qualified math teachers.

Horty was talking about communication problems between deaf and hearing people. I remember years ago we didn't like signing in public; we'd keep our signs low and inconspicuous. It's different now. People sign everywhere and think nothing of it. Hearing people understand our need to communicate in language that lets us be comfortable in social situations and more and more hearing people can sign. But for extended conversations, it's still more comfortable for deaf people to talk with other deaf people.

Mainstreaming has some positive things in it as well as many

## . . . Say It In Signs

By Cindy Schneider

I grew up in a hearing world. I had no knowledge of deafness until I was 23. At age 23, I became profoundly deaf after surgery was required to remove tumors found in my inner ears. I was unprepared for the change.

The ache of remembering how it was started immediately after surgery. Wanting the same intimacy with others, but unable to grasp it. I had learned a few signs before surgery, but that knowledge did not matter since no people were around who knew how to answer back.

Since that time, things have changed. Sign language has become my link to the world. With sign language I feel included and involved with events occurring around me. Without sign language, I could not participate fully in life. If I could not communicate freely with people, life would be empty.

I guess that is why I do not understand all this talk against sign language. It is a beautiful and expressive language. Most people use some form of signing without even thinking about it. Look around on the streets, and see how many people use their hands to communicate.

Too much emphasis is placed on language, when the focus should be on communication, the passing of ideas from one person to another. If you can not hear me say how I feel, you would not know how I feel inside; however, if I draw you a picture, then no matter what language you know, you will understand me. That is the beauty of sign language, anyone can understand the message.

I do think language has importance; reading and writing are important too. But if you want to talk to me, if you want me to understand what you have to say; then please, please, say it to me in signs.

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negative things. For one thing, there is very little social life, almost none. Our daughter was director of interpreters in New Hampshire, where they don't have a school for the deaf, deaf children have to go to mainstream programs except for a few that go to Vermont or Connecticut. Probably 90% of them are mainstreamed. I went to visit my daughter and sat in a couple of classes. It was interesting. I thought it was good for the really smart kids but for the average kids, it was really difficult. I noticed that many of the teachers couldn't sign and depended on an interpreter. In the public school classrooms, there were like 10 hearing kids and one deaf child or maybe 20 hearing and two deaf children and the interpreter would be signing away. If the deaf kids didn't understand and raised their hands and asked the interpreter to repeat, the interpreter would say, "Wait a minute," and by the time she repeated what was said, the instructor would be like 10 blocks ahead. So the deaf children stopped asking questions and just sat there. They weren't learning anything; they were spending their time daydreaming.

# Alcoholism Services For The Hearing Impaired

By VICKI T. HURWITZ and PATRICK R. MORRISON

Alcohol is widely used for medicinal purposes, religious rites and, of course, is used and misused when consumed.

In spite of known negative effects on people, it was not until 1956 that the American Medical Association formally accepted and defined alcoholism as a disease that was characterized by its own signs and symptoms. Today professionals working in the field refer to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III (DSMIII) as a tool for diagnosing people with the disease of Alcoholism. "The essential features of Alcohol Dependence are either a pattern of pathological alcohol use or impairment in social or occupational functioning due to alcohol, and either tolerance or withdrawal. Alcohol Dependence has also been called Alcoholism."<sup>1</sup>

The DSMIII further defines Alcoholism as a "Pattern of pathological alcohol use; a need for daily use of alcohol for adequate functioning; inability to cut down or stop drinking; repeated efforts to control or reduce drinking by "going on the wagon" (periods of temporary abstinence) or restricting drinking to certain times of the day; binges (remaining intoxicated throughout the day for at least two days); occasionally consumption of a fifth of spirits (or its equivalent in wine or beer); amnesic periods for events occurring while intoxicated (black-outs); continuation of drinking despite a serious physical disorder that the individual knows is exacerbated by alcohol use; drinking of non-beverage alcohol."<sup>2</sup> When this disease strikes, it creates negative effects on a person's mental, physical, social and spiritual being.

The disease of alcoholism is not selective of who it will strike. It crosses all lines of race, religion, nationality and sex. Furthermore, the disease can be passed down through generations within a family. "With only a few studies completed on substance abuse problems among deaf people, conclusions are necessarily tentative. In general, deaf people follow the same drinking patterns as most Americans. Their one significant departure is the use of the deaf club by members of the deaf community as a social gathering place. As with other Americans, 1 out of 10 deaf drinkers will seriously abuse alcohol."<sup>3</sup>

When abuse become addiction, the life of an alcoholic begins to unravel. The person will begin to experience social problems such as the loss of friends due to drinking. There will be increased tension in the home caused by alcohol becoming more important than family members. Often, employment difficulties arise with high absenteeism rates and job losses. Legal problems ranging from public intoxication to driving while intoxicated can be seen in the life of an alcoholic.

Alcohol can affect a person's mind causing decreased mental ability and blackouts, the inability to recall behavior when drunk. Physically, alcohol is known to cause esophagitis, ulcers, pancreatitis, fatty livers and in extreme cases cirrhosis

*Vicki T. Hurwitz is a social worker at the John L. Norris Alcoholism Treatment Center in Rochester, New York. Patrick R. Morrison functions in the dual role of social worker/interpreter at the Center.*

of the liver which can be fatal if not treated. By far, the saddest effect of alcoholism is when a person loses the will to live and attempts or even worse yet succeeds in killing himself.

**Editor's Note: In light of these sobering facts, agencies across the country are acting to create and provide services to the hearing impaired alcoholic. The John L. Norris Alcoholism Treatment Facility is one such agency.** Norris Clinic is located in Rochester, New York, and is the only residential program fully accessible to the hearing impaired alcoholic in the state.

The John L. Norris Clinic has the capability to house 44 patients. Of the 44 beds in the unit, six have been designated for hearing impaired persons. The average length of stay in the unit is 60 days. This provides adequate time for a person to gain a broad base of knowledge on the disease of alcoholism and acquire tools that may be used to begin living a sober life.

The program is structured so as to provide a wide range of services to people in treatment. Individual counselling will occur at least weekly and group counselling is daily. The group counselling component has many specialty topics dealing with issues of assertiveness, grief, victimization, deafness, relapse prevention, insight oriented and Adult Children of Alcoholics. Along with the issues identified in individual and group counselling, the clinic addresses the problem of the alcoholic who also abuses other substances such as marijuana or cocaine. In addition to counselling for problems stemming from drinking, people in treatment receive recreational counselling to identify new hobbies and activities.

The John L. Norris Clinic is able to provide this wide range of services to patients by employing a variety of staff. When using the team approach in treatment, the services of a medical doctor, physician assistant, nurses, psychologist, psychiatrist, social workers, recreational therapist and alcoholism counselors can all be made available to the hearing impaired person.

The clinic began developing its hearing impaired program in 1981. At that time, patients were fully mainstreamed into treatment with the use of one part-time interpreter. Today patients are mainstreamed into part of the program and receive the other portion directly from counselors who are able to sign. The agency now employs two Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf-certified interpreters, one full-time and one half-time, in addition a full-time social worker who is hearing impaired and able to communicate directly with patients. The program is still based on a team approach and with the addition of the new staff patients, participants have a large skill base to draw from when learning about their disease.

If you would like more information on the disease of alcoholism or the John L. Norris Clinic, please contact the clinic at (716) 461-0410 (voice) or (716) 461-4253 (TTY).

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition, American Psychiatric Association, Copyright 1980, p. 169.
- <sup>2</sup>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition, American Psychiatric Association, Copyright 1980, p. 170.
- <sup>3</sup>Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness, John V. Van Cleve, Editor-in-Chief, McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., p. 9.

# To Muzzle Or Not To Muzzle . . . . . . Your Hearing Dog?

By LAILA KHALIL

Friday December 12, 1986. Christmas time again.

I went shopping at Walt Whitman Mall, Huntington, Long Island. The Salvation Army's black pot was set in front of Macy's. I saw the volunteer raising her arm with the bell and then dropping it. The bell must have sounded cheerful. I deposited a dollar bill into the pot and walked along with my hearing dog.

In front of A&S Department store at the other end of the Mall, Santa Claus, red and white, was sitting on his throne holding an excited child on his lap. The proud mommy's smile went all around her face as the camera's light flickered on and off. The next child in line scrambled eagerly, climbed the padded Santa and stationed himself on the inviting lap, his mouth moving at the same time, probably heralding an assurance that he had been a very good boy *all* year long and would Santa please bring him a bike!

"Where did the years go? It was only yesterday that I was one of those proud mommies standing in line with my two kids." The too familiar cliché passed through my thoughts.

I continued walking.

March the fourth, the same year, I had lost my hearing and discovered that deafness is more than the loss of sound. Deafness is a honed knife that cuts a person abruptly and evenly from the society as that person knows it. People tend to *walk* away from someone who is sick. They have more reason to *run*, if a person is deaf.

It's a very lonely world in here.

The July after, a hearing-ear dog joined my world. I was fortunate enough to acquire the dog just two months after I had applied for one. There is usually a waiting period of 18 months to get a hearing-ear dog. To me, Spooky was God sent. He became more than the dog that alerts me to sounds. He became my companion and friend. With him around, there is some balance to my earless life; I'm not as lonely or as rejected as I was during the few months before.

December 1986, my first Christmas since I lost my hearing. I couldn't hear the "Ho, Ho, Ho's," the jingled bells or Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer songs, but I could still remember the tones and the music chimed in my head.

I sang them to myself.

Though I knew that year's Christmas would not bring me its sounds of exhilaration and mirth as I remembered them, there was no reason why my kids, nieces, and nephews should feel my depression and not enjoy the season. Friday morning I went Christmas shopping.

I prefer shopping in the mornings when the crowd is minimal. This way, I avoid the afternoon crush of people who in their zeal, push and zip by recklessly unaware that someone among them might just lose her balance and fall under their feet.

I walked slowly and leisurely through the Mall with Spooky, admiring the decorations, the lights and the enticing signs which meant to lure joyous customers into buying . . . and buying.

As I walked, I was approached by many people who stopped me to remind me of the law concerning dogs. I explained to them that a hearing dog goes with its master anywhere and everywhere. Not that it was any of their business, but I felt that hearing dogs being a new issue needed some explanation. Actually, I started to look forward to being approached because it gave me the chance to trigger a conversation with the polite women who stopped me.

**SURPRISE!** They found out that a deaf person *can* communicate.

An hour later I was getting tired. I needed a rest before I continued with my shopping.

Fridays are short days for me, because they are half school days for my son. I have to be home around 1:00 p.m. And that particular Friday was even shorter since I wanted to pick him up for his hair cut appointment.

I stepped into "Foods of All Nations" to buy a cup of coffee. That store has the best coffee I have ever tasted.

I sat on a bench right outside the store and contentedly sipped my coffee. My dog Spooky, well-trained and knowing what to do, sat noiselessly at my feet.

I felt a presence near me as my dog sprang up to an alert. I looked up at the scolding face of a security guard and saw a forbidding anger on his features.

"Take that dog out," he ordered, I perceived from the way his mouth moved and his arm shot towards the Mall's door.

"He's my hearing dog," I explained.

"He has to be . . .," he replied.

"He has to be what?" I asked, when I failed to guess his word.

". . .!" he repeated.

"I can't get the word," I began, "wait a second. Here is my writing pad, write me what you're saying."

He did with annoyance. I hate it when people get annoyed if I can't lipread them or guess their words. Don't they know how embarrassing it is for us, the deaf, to ask for an encore?

"Muzzled," I read.

"Muzzled?" I repeated stupidly. "Why muzzled?"

"Dogs have to be muzzled," he pointed a finger in my face. I wanted to bite it! Who did he think he was anyway?

"Seeing-eye dogs aren't muzzled," I countered.

"Yes they **ARE**," he fabricated, "it's the **LAW!**"

"Well, I've never heard of such a law. Here is my permit for the dog. It doesn't say anything about him being muzzled."

"Take the dog *out!*" I felt him scream.

I knew that he had screamed because my dog became so nervous that he jumped on the bench, started to shake and growled at the guard in his efforts to protect me.

“ . . . . . ?!” the guard was saying rapidly and obviously noisily. We had attracted an audience.

“What did you say?” I asked, wanting to know what was going on and feeling miserable.

“Don’t give me **THAT!**” he said slowly, emphatically. I wanted to die.

“Take the dog *out!*” I felt him scream again.

I looked at him with all the hurt inside me and gave back as much as I got, “No, I won’t take him out and you *can’t* make me. Call the police.”

“Ok.” He held his walkie-talkie to his mouth, talked into it (God knows what he said), and stood waiting. A few seconds later, we were joined by another security guard.

“Did you call the police?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he nodded.

Spooky became agitated; he stood on my lap sideways. I guess he figured that if he used his length he could shield me from the guards’ view. He wasn’t big enough.

I patted him lovingly to soothe his fears, but he continued to shake; his eyes were wide open and fixed on the guards.

The minutes passed agonizingly slowly and there were no police.

I looked longingly towards the telephone booth a few feet away. Last year I was able to use the phone, this year I have a machine. If I want to call someone, the other person must have a similar machine to communicate with me, otherwise, I have to ask a third person to make the call for me.

I hated myself for my inability to call the police myself. I had lost more than my hearing, I had lost my unconditional independence.

There was nothing to do then but wait. I waited and waited for the police to come over and release me from this situation. No one showed up. Meanwhile, the two guards were standing a few feet away from me joking and laughing together with no regard whatsoever to how I felt sitting there not hearing a thing, not knowing if the guard had really called the police and hating my deafness as I had never hated it before. How could someone who serves the public be so insensitive? How would those guards feel if they were forced to sit among a group who talked and joked in Russian, Chinese or German? I bet their first reaction would be annoyance that those people were impudent and rude to exclude them from their socializing. They

might even feel that all the joking and talking was about them?

“Speak English, Man,” would be their vehement objection to the fact that they were left out.

As for me, the day was ruined. My struggle to accept and cope with my deafness took several steps backwards that day. And what’s worse? Since that day my good-tempered Spooky turned into a vicious dog that would attack *any* man, especially a man wearing a leather jacket, and Spooky would go berserk if he just glimpsed a walkie-talkie.

When I contacted my dog trainer assistant, she informed me that time would heal Spooky and that if he wasn’t confronted by a similar encounter, he would soon forget the first one and return to normal.

Alas, Spooky hasn’t returned to normal, and I have to be aware of where I go with him and keep him away from men in leather jackets. My outing with Spooky became a test to my nerves since I can’t possibly hear anyone approaching, much less men.

And that’s not fair.

The whole episode was blown out of proportion. If I had had someone with me that day, or if any of the onlookers had come to my rescue, I would have been very much in the picture, and that security guard wouldn’t have taken full advantage of this one-sided situation.

Even though I later complained to the Mall’s management about the incident, and hoped that the management, at the very least, would grant me some kind of amends in the form of setting the guards aright, nothing came of it.

The guard is still at the Mall, happily picking his victims as he goes, setting his own rules and carrying them out the way he sees fit.

The sign, the management had promised me to display on the Mall’s doors acknowledging the rights of hearing dogs to accompany their deaf masters, never materialized.

“Muzzle your dog!” he had said.

If that guard was well-informed, he would have known that dogs which are trained to help the physically challenged are chosen for their temperaments as well as their ability to learn fast.

To muzzle or not to muzzle? That was the question. Was it worth the answer?

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# *Historical, Cultural, Psychological and Educational Aspects of American Sign Language*

By McCAY VERNON, Ph.D. and JAMES M. WALLRABENSTEIN, M.A.

## **Abstract**

Sign language is as old as mankind. Yet, until recently there has been little interest in its structure or value in applied use. Historically, while sign language in some form is used almost daily by nearly all hearing persons, it has been denied use by many deaf people as an invaluable source of communication. Parallels may be drawn between the sociological and psychological conditions present in France at the time of the first documented historical information about sign language and contemporary conditions during the current wave of interest in sign language and its uses. Parallels are also visible cross-culturally in terms of the sign systems originating or developed within various countries. Important applications in the use of sign language have been made out only with deaf persons, but with hearing persons suffering from aphasia, autism and other communication problems. Research has shown that even primates are capable of learning and communicating in sign language. Finally, the value of sign language in helping normal hearing children learn to read is explored, and the acceptance of sign language into the course work of many colleges and universities noted.

## **Historical Perspectives**

We are in the midst of a revolution in terms of the role sign language is playing in the lives of deaf people. Equally dramatic changes are occurring in its use with normally hearing individuals. It is almost impossible, as we ride the crest of this linguistic wave of change, to realize how suddenly it has all come about. Twenty years ago authors of books on sign language could find no publishers. There was no market, and little interest in the topic. For example, as recently as 1972 a leading author in the field, Lou Fant (1972), had to pay out of his own pocket to have his initial sign language book printed. By contrast, today the sale of the leading sign language instruction book (O'Rourke, 1976) is a major commercial success currently being imitated internationally. This book alone has grossed over a half million dollars in sales and was recently revised. Such success is representative of the massive change which has occurred over a relatively brief period.

Two decades ago no school for deaf children would admit that it used sign language throughout its entire educational program. Today most deaf children are being taught using some means of Total Communication as are taught in programs restricted only to oralism (Jordan, Gustason, & Rosen, 1979). This is tremendous progress, but at the same time it is only a beginning relative to what is needed and what is to come.

The psychological and sociological implications of the increasing recognition given sign language have a significance and generality which is not fully understood, but which nevertheless is fascinating. For example, if we go back over 200 years to the first well-documented historical information about sign language, we find exactly the same events occurring then that we are experiencing today (Lane, 1976; Siegel, 1969). That was a period of change in French society analogous in some respects to changes our country is now going through. In this climate of intellectual freedom, some French scholars became interested in sign language and took it upon themselves to learn it from deaf people. Of these, one, the Abbe de l'Epee, soon did what we find being done today. He altered the natural sign language of French deaf people by adding verb endings, plurals, new terms, changing basic signs and in general adapted it to the syntax, morphology and grammar of the spoken French language (Lane, 1976). In essence, it became to French what today SEE and LOVE are to English.

The Abbe de l'Epee would then give performances for the public in which he would dictate in his "methodical" sign language and have his students copy in written French what he had signed. The public was duly impressed and Abbe de l'Epee became famous. No one realized that the deaf children on display has no more concept of the *meaning* of the French that they had written than does the parrot which repeats the obscenities of the sailor who owns him. Although the Abbe de l'Epee knew that what he was doing was a *tour de force*, he kept this to himself and enjoyed his new found fame and income.

Abbe de l'Epee's demonstrations occurred during a period in France when there was a strong belief that mental retardation was environmentally caused. Thus, it could be "cured." By the same token, deaf children could be made "hearing." The parallel claims of some of today's behavioral modificationists and extremists among mainstreaming advocates are frightening evidence of how little we learn from history, thereby repeating it.

There are other parallels. While the Abbe de l'Epee was exploitively, and in a linguistic sense naively, trying to "teach deaf people to sign," a more sophisticated Frenchman, and success of de l'Epee's, the Abbe Sicard, was saying, "As a foreigner can't teach Frenchmen the French language, so a man who speaks should not get involved in teaching signs to deaf people" (Siegel, 1969).

A final parallel tells us that even centuries ago the "oral/Total Communication" controversy existed. We have Stewart, one of the first teachers of the deaf-blind saying, "To teach the deaf to speak, while entitled to rank only a little higher than the art of training starlings and parrots, will always appear to the multitude a far more wonderful feat of ingenuity than to unfold silently the latent intellectual potentials of deaf people through the use of sign language" (Seigel, 1969).

The point of this historical perspective is to show that the psychological and social issues involved in sign language have tremendous depth and generality. Otherwise, they would not have survived as issues for hundreds of years.

### **Cultural Perspective**

The same historical parallels that have been drawn regarding sign language exist if we look at the issues cross *culturally*. England has its Pagit-Gorman system which is an artificial form of sign language analogous to SEE and LOVE, and Abbe de l'Epee's signed French. Iran has its Bachebon system which corresponds to Dr. Cornett's Cued Speech. Israel has a signed form of Hebrew devised by a hearing college professor (Schlesinger and Namir, 1977). Thus, not only do the issues involving sign language transcend history, they also generalize across cultures. These issues involve dimensions which have much deeper human meaning than is realized.

### **Language and Culture**

George Orwell, the British political philosopher, tells us that the best way to suppress or to eliminate a culture is to repress, bastardize or destroy its language. We see countless instances of this in history. An example of this is seen during the Spanish Inquisition when it was decided that Jews should be destroyed. One of the basic approaches was to forbid the teaching of Hebrew. However, one of the main reasons the rich heritage of Jewish culture has survived is that traditionally Jews have taught their language, difficult as it is, to their children. Even under conditions of repression, when formal teaching of Hebrew was impossible, Yiddish was taught.

With deaf people we have had centuries of repression of sign language. Even today thousands of deaf children and adults are being denied manual communication. For example, in Baltimore County (Maryland), deaf children are not only denied sign language, they are punished if they use it. One of the largest organizations involved with deafness, one which advocates oralism, not only tries to exterminate sign language in schools and homes, but has even attempted to forbid deaf actors from appearing on television in plays using sign language.

Such arrogant autocratic practices are becoming less and less successful. However, because they were so dominant in the past, the culture, art, tradition and sign language of the deaf community has been denied full expression and is therefore underdeveloped.

### **Sign Language in the General Culture**

It is the extreme of hostile irony that while we hearing people deny deaf people sign language, we use it ourselves in almost all aspects of our own life. In fact, we do not realize how universal it is. Most of us know at least two or three sign systems and use them regularly in our daily lives. Perhaps a large number of examples will best illustrate how widespread is our use of signs.

Referees in all sports communicate their decisions almost exclusively in signs. The baseball umpire's signs for "safe," "out" and other terms are used with such frequency that they are familiar to most Americans. Football officials have developed such an intricate vocabulary of signs that it is necessary to publish it in football programs to help fans understand the game.

Visual signaling by semaphore, most often utilizing two flags held on in each hand, has been used for over a century by railroad crews, racetrack officials and others. The system of semaphore signals includes all letters of the alphabet as well as numerical representations.

In church, signs are universally used for important concepts such as prayer, blessing and for many other religious terms. Certain monastic groups such as the Cistercian and the Trappist have devised complete sign language systems (Barakat, 1975).

It is somewhat paradoxical that in music, the key person, the conductor, does all of his communicating in sign language. He gives both cognitive and affective instructions to the entire orchestra by signs. Further, these signs do not follow English syntax.

In painting, especially during the Renaissance and Middle Ages, the human figures were drawn using religious signs in order to help the artist communicate their concepts and to help them direct the viewer's eye (Siger, 1968). Leonardo De Vinci was especially sensitive to these techniques and their potential value (Siger, 1968). Other examples from everyday life abound. Navy frogmen use regular American Sign Language in their underwater work. Each of us who drives a car regularly signs to indicate turns. In fact, a failure to do so is a violation of the law. Hawaiian dancers tell intricate tales using beautiful signs that are world famous. Dancers in India have devised a complex sign language of such intricacy and aesthetic appeal that it is published in book form. On a different level, the bumps and grinds of the exotic dancer in burlesque are iconic signs universally understood.

The people of Sicily invested and used a sign language when they were invaded by foreigners and forbidden to speak their native tongue. Prisoners in all nations devise sign systems. Grounds crews guide huge airliners into parking areas with signs. Most secret organizations such as fraternities, masonic groups and clubs have their own secret gestures, handshakes or signals.

In certain periods of history entire hearing populations have learned signed languages. For example, the North American Indians in the 1500s and the Australian aborigines of today employ sign language throughout their society (Skelly, 1979; Umiker-Sebeok and Sebeok, 1978).

One could cite examples of the use of sign language in the everyday lives of all of us nearly indefinitely. Two points derive from these examples. One is the universality of sign language. The other is the absolute irony and tyranny of repressing its use by those who need it most of all, deaf persons (Stokoe, 1980). Hearing people are quick to tell deaf people to depend on lip-reading, but these same hearing people are not about to use it in noisy settings or places they themselves cannot hear well such as to conduct orchestras, officiate athletic events, communicate underwater, lead church services, direct traffic, guide airplanes or communicate the aesthetics of dance. Just imagine a traffic officer who relied upon lipreading alone!

Sign language as we have shown, is very basic to all human communication. It has been suggested that a sign language was used by our ancestors before they learned to speak.

#### Use of American Sign Language with Hearing People

**Aphasics**—It has long been recognized by teachers and others who work with deaf children that a significant number of these youth are also aphasic, that is, they are unable to master printed or oral/aurally presented language. Yet, these same students are often fluent in sign language (Vernon, Coley, & Ottinger, 1979).

A number of speech pathologists and rehabilitation specialists have used this information and have tried sign language with aphasics, especially stroke victims (Chen, 1971). They have reported excellent results. In brief, the normally hearing individuals studied who had become aphasic and therefore unable to communicate via conventional means were able to learn basic sign language. This made it possible for them to make their wants known; consequently, it played a major role in the rehabilitation of these patients.

In addition to the importance this use of sign language has for the treatment of aphasics, it also raises rather fascinating neurological questions. The major one is with reference to laterality. It may be that the motor-linguistic functioning required for sign language is located in the hemisphere opposite that for other language learning which depends primarily on audition (Poizner & Lane, 1979).

**Autism**—One of the few breakthroughs that has occurred in the rather discouraging therapeutic efforts directed toward the problem of childhood autism has been through the use of sign language. Therapists have found that with normally hearing autistics when all other efforts to elicit communication failed, sign language was effective in opening the door to beginning interaction (Bonvillian and Nelson, 1976). The senior author has had similar experiences in the treatment of very withdrawn schizophrenic persons and with one case of a dying child who reacted to his trauma with an almost total withdrawal. Exactly why sign language seems to facilitate communication in autism, schizophrenia and severe withdrawal is unclear. Of possible tangential relevance is the work of Kline et al. (1980) indicating that psycho-pathology is more apparent in a patient's native language. However, it seems far more likely that the factors such as the full body movement required in sign language, its separation from the mouth and its basic freedom from past negative associations are more likely hypotheses to account for its effectiveness. Regardless, the application of sign language as a tool in the remediation of communication problems of organic and psychological etiology is a rich new field thus far relatively unexplored, yet full of clinical and theoretical possibilities.

#### Use of Sign Language with Animals

It has been clearly established that primates can learn signs, and probably sign language, and even teach it to their offspring. Yet, they are unable to learn oral or printed language (Gardner & Gardner, 1975; Premak, 1971). This suggests that the motoric and iconic nature of sign language may make it basically easier to learn. Regardless of the reason, the fact that it is simpler to learn than conventional oral language makes it a

potentially valuable tool for facilitating communication in those for whom communication is a problem.

#### Educational Perspectives

Perhaps the most exciting application of manual communication is in the teaching of reading and reading readiness skills to hearing children. Joanne Greenberg, author of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, once said in penetrating prophetically insightful jest, "Sign language is too good for deaf people!" by which she meant that it had great potential for use with those who can hear.

Fingerspelling has the more readily apparent value in teaching reading (Vernon & Coley, 1978). By learning to form the manual alphabet letters on the hand which corresponds to regular printed letters, the child gets strong kinesthetic feedback and reinforcement along with added visual input. Of course, the whole idea of associating reading with a pleasurable motoric activity has tremendous appeal to young children for whom a legitimate chance for physical activity in school is almost universally well received. It is also of importance to note that many of the hand positions of manually formed letters are shaped exactly like the printed letters. In all 26 letters there are noticable similarities. Stated somewhat differently, the manually formed letters are icons of their printed counterparts. Among children who use iconic languages, for example, certain forms of Japanese and Chinese, there are a minutia of reading problems as contrasted to the number of such problems found among children asked to read non-iconic languages such as English, French, Spanish or German (Chen, 1971).

Further evidence of the potential value of fingerspelling in teaching reading to hearing children comes from studies of deaf children of deaf parents (Bellugi and Fischer, 1972). Many of them are fluent fingerspellers before they ever reach school age. In other words, they can read and write before having been taught to do so formally. They are reading words and sentences manually spelled to them by their parents (receptive language). Even more surprisingly, they can "write" (i.e., fingerspell words and sentences to their parents) expressive language. Once these deaf children enter school, the reading of conventional print symbols is rapidly and easily learned. In fact, many deaf children of deaf parents come to school able to read because their parents have already taught them to associate the manual and print alphabet symbols (Hofsteater, 1959).

If this occurs among deaf children, who, when they do not have early exposure to fingerspelling generally have great difficulty learning to read, then the potential of fingerspelling for teaching normally hearing children to read is immense. The reason is that the use of fingerspelling involves the kinesthetic, multimodal, motivating, classical conditioning, iconic and sensory training principles basic to learning theory which are involved in teaching reading and in remediating reading problems.

The potential of this approach is starting to be realized. For example, the popular children's television series *Sesame Street* regularly includes the manual alphabet in its presentation of alphabet letters and words. A book, *The Language Arts Handbook*, University Park Press, 1982 (Greenberg, Vernon, Dubois, MacKnight), instructs teachers how to use the technique. Another publisher, Joyce Media, Inc. (P.O. Box 458,

Northridge, CA 91328), has produced books of children's stories with the conventional print symbols printed right above the picture of a hand which shows the manual alphabet letter. Gallaudet University prints books in combined sign language and print. A group of progressive young teachers in Maryland and West Virginia (Dubois, Personal Communication, 1977) began using the technique with normal and with learning disabled students. Clinically, they are reporting remarkable success. At the completion of the experimental trials, they will be reporting more formally the data of their work.

The use of signs, especially iconic signs, is similar to the use of fingerspelling to teach reading. It involves all of the same learning principles (i.e., multimodal approach, conditioning, etc.) Because signs are so vivid, dramatic and fascinating, they serve as a powerful motivating force for children to want to learn reading and to enjoy it once they begin.

The burgeoning use of manual communication to teach hearing children to read may be prophetic fulfillment of Mrs. Greenberg's double entendre, "Sign language is too good for deaf people!"

### Sign Language in College and Universities

Until the 1960s, the only college in the world teaching American Sign Language was Gallaudet. Even there it was given to select graduate students for one-hour credit under a misnomer, *dactology*. Representatives of the Alexander Graham Bell Association, an organization which vigorously opposes sign language, were sufficiently naive and/or biased to be claiming that it was not even a language. Today sign language is offered in over 150 colleges in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain and other countries. Several colleges offer degree programs in sign language interpretation. Outstanding graduate schools such as New York University and American University accept it as a language in which doctoral students may meet their language proficiency requirements for the Ph.D. degree. The world famous Salk Institute has the prominent linguist, Ursula Bellugi, and her research team devoting full time to sign language studies. A deaf professional group, the National Theatre of the Deaf, has received great critical and popular acclaim in this country and around the world for its dramatic presentations in sign language. This theatrical work reveals the great artistic quality of choreographed signs.

### Conclusion

We have shown that there has been a tremendous growth in academic, artistic and linguistic respectability for sign language in the past 20 years. Never before has this language enjoyed the high status and respect it has at last been granted. Evidence suggests this may be just the beginning of a much broader use and appreciation of the language of deaf people by people who can hear.

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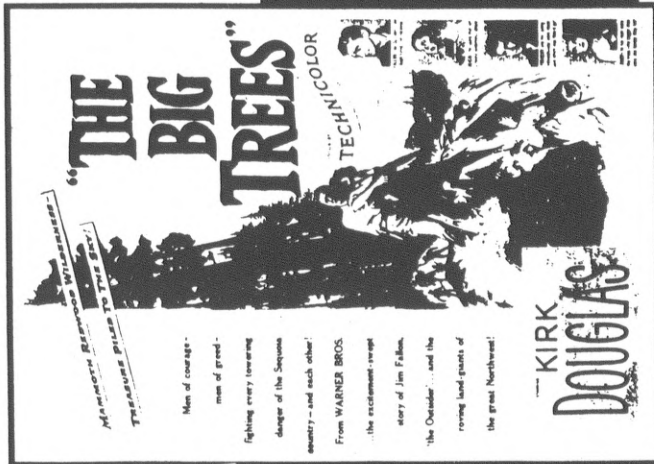
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